

Exploring Norwegian Parish Registers

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For anyone setting out to research their Norwegian ancestry it is important having a basic knowledge of the process of Norwegian genealogical research procedures. Assuming you already know the specific place your ancestor was born in Norway, the process is quite straight forward. However, since the records are kept *at the parish level*, you must, as a general rule, know the specific parish. The records were kept by the local parish priest, and after 1812, a copy was kept by his warden/clerk (klokkerbok).

The objectives for this class are to answer the following questions:

- What are parish registers
- What kind of information do they contain
- When did they start
- Do the content vary during the various time periods

The Records:

The oldest parish register in Norway is from Andebu, and started 1623; most from early 1700's. Be aware of the three additional letters: Æ(æ), Ø(ø), and Å(å); will be found at the end of the alphabet. Records are kept in various "forms": narrative, columns and "fill-ins".

Keep in mind the patronymic naming patterns, Gothic handwriting, no standardized spelling!

Birth/christening:

During the 1800's and 1900's you will find two dates in the birth/christening record, the birth date and the christening date. As you search back into the 1700's and 1600's you will find one date, and that will be the christening date. The christening was the responsibility of the priest, so the date on which he performed the christening would be the date he was concerned about.

Introductions:

After giving birth the women were considered to be unclean, a tradition that goes back to early biblical times. They had to be re-introduced to the congregation before being allowed back into the church. This took place about six weeks after the baby was born. Because of this rule the mothers were rarely at their own children's christening.

Mothers of illegitimate children were (as a general rule) introduced separately.

Confirmation:

Around the ages of 14-17 the youth had to be confirmed. They would meet with the parish priest and study the Lutheran catechism. This was made law ab. 1736. In order to marry, serve in the military, or hold a political office the parishioners had to show proof of confirmation.

Engagement/Marriage:

Going back in time an engagement was considered to be a legally binding contract. There had to be two sponsors/bondsmen which *could be* fathers or brothers, but did not have to be. Banns had to be read three consecutive Sundays before the wedding, to allow for any objections to the marriage taking place.

Death/Burial:

In searching the death/burial dates you will, in recent times, find two dates; the death date and the burial date. As you go back in time you will find one date, and that will be the burial date. Criminals and suicides (and at times un-christened babies) were not allowed to be buried in "sacred" ground, and had to be buried outside the cemetery boundaries.

Moving in and out:

The moving records can usually be found between 1812-late 1800's. As people wanted to move out of the parish they had to have permission (in earlier times) and a certificate from the parish priest in order to do so.

Absolutions:

When parishioners had committed a "sin", they had to be pardoned by the church. They had to stand before the congregation and confess their sin (s). The most common sins were adultery, having illegitimate children, theft, not partaking of the communion, and drunkenness.

The oldest parish register in Norway is from Andebu parish in Vestfold County, and starts in 1623. Most start late 1600- early 1700.

Christening Record 1700's

Christening date and place	Names of parents	Name of child	Godparents

Engagement and marriage record 1700's

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Døm: 17 ^{te} post Trinit. Hnd Teet.	Erolovse. Gregers Nielsen. Randi Olsd.	Reputatur. Døm: 20 ^{te} post Trinit. Hnd Teet.	Caution. Hans Hansen. Ole Aas.
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Date of engagement	Names of groom and bride to be	Marriage date and place	sponsors
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Death and burial record 1832

Death date	Burial date	Name of person, occupation, birth information	Age	Residence at the time of death	Cause of death
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9 May. 1832.	16 May	Danchert Danchertsen, Fjellmand, 39 født: MS 17. 24 93. v. j. 12.	39	— 7 — 9 B.	— Klung
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Gothic Handwriting:

In order to read the Old Norwegian (and Danish and Swedish) parish records you need a basic understanding of the Gothic handwriting. Here are a few examples of the most common words found in the parish registers, and a few variations of spelling and handwriting:

Births



Engagements



orig 26

30de

To further your learning:

There are places online where you can find examples and help.

FamilySearch Wiki:

- https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Norway_Genealogy

Arkivverket-Digitalarkivet

- www.digitalarkivet.no
- <http://arkivverket.no/eng/Using-the-Archives/Genealogical-Research>
- <http://arkivverket.no/eng/Digitalarkivet/About-the-Digital-Archives/Contact/Useful-Links>